

CONFLICT TRENDS


in the 21st Century

By MICHAEL MOODIE

United Nations (Marie Frechon)

As the Cold War was coming to a close, most of the world had never heard of the small Yugoslavian provinces of Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo, let alone believed they would demand global attention. Nor would the world have believed that a state such as North Korea, deemed a “basket case” in many fundamental functions of government, would acquire nuclear weapons and maintain chemical and biological capabilities. A global network of extremists based on the perversion of one of the world’s great religions that was willing to resort to sustained acts of violence resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians was a scenario worthy only of a movie script. The identification of U.S. national security priorities as waging a “global war on terror” and the deployment of tens of thousands of U.S. troops to preempt a “gathering” threat to the Nation’s security—troops who would then become engaged in a protracted attempt to create a democratic nation-state in the midst of a civil war—were on no one’s radar.

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A photograph showing three young boys in a grassy field. The boy on the left is wearing a brown, sleeveless tunic. The boy in the middle is wearing a red t-shirt with a colorful graphic. The boy on the right is wearing a green military-style jacket and is holding a black assault rifle. They are all looking towards the camera. The background shows a hilly landscape with trees and a cloudy sky.

Child soldiers, like these in Democratic Republic of the Congo, are common in failed and failing states

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Far from promoting peace and stability, the end of the Cold War invited disorder and conflict. It took the lid off confrontations thought too dangerous at a time of superpower showdown, unleashed rivalries and competitions whose fires had been banked by the chill of the East-West standoff, and fostered a succession of violent eruptions that the world could not ignore, even though they occurred in parts of the globe long considered peripheral to the central security dynamic.

Consequences of ethnic conflicts, such as large numbers of refugees, are becoming common in the 21st century



United Nations (H.J. Davies)

It has become a cliché to argue that the major challenges today are instability and conflict fostered by regional and local tensions stemming from such diverse sources as historical animosity; ethnic, religious, or other forms of communal hostility; control over resources; and attempted regional hegemony. These conflicts frequently have little or no politically ideological character and can erupt in unexpected places and ways. Their inherent dangers are made more ominous by the proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) weapons and their means of delivery.

As with most clichés, these views contain a central element of truth. It is generally agreed that war between great powers is unlikely, although not impossible. In 2005, for example, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's conflict database reported no interstate conflicts for the first time. Some analysts even argue that major war has become "obsolete," not in the sense that it is not possible, but that it is improbable because war no longer serves political purposes. While many other analysts think this view overstates the case, there is considerable agreement that a "total war" of the World War II variety is not and should not be a major concern for today's or tomorrow's policymakers.

Caution should be the watchword in evaluating trends related to conflict, however. In 1838, Lieutenant General Antoine-Henri de Jomini wrote in his *Summary of the Art of War* that "the means of destruction are approaching perfection with frightful rapidity."¹ Jomini was wrong. It took more than

major power competition has a military dimension even if it is not prominent at the moment

100 years for nuclear weapons to make their appearance. Even good analysts can be wrong about trends. In less than 20 years, prevailing paradigms that ordered both thinking and policy with respect to conflict have been shattered and replaced with paradigms entailing profound differences.

An examination of trends in conflict can be conducted by addressing three dimensions: the nature of the conflict, why it occurs, and how it is waged.

What Kinds of Conflict?

It is useful to remember Donald Kagan's admonition that the one great truth of history is that "there is always one other possibility besides all the ones that you can imagine."² Even if World War II-style conflicts are no longer serious prospects, a wide array of state actors could interact in diverse ways to create multiple scenarios that are anything but benign. Major power competition, for example, has a military dimension even if it is not prominent at the moment. The continuing centrality of U.S., Chinese, and Russian nuclear weapons in national security policies provides an important reminder of this reality, as does China's modernization

of its conventional forces. A second tier of aspiring major powers or regional powers is in a position to capitalize on the global diffusion of technology that will become even more prevalent in the years ahead, and they appear to believe they are not getting their due from an international system they see as designed by and for the major powers. As a result, they sometimes nurture animosity toward those major powers and often toward one another. The environment is further complicated by states that do not play by the rules. North Korea, for example, may not be particularly powerful in absolute terms, but it is unwilling to abide by international norms, and its national priorities elevate power in all forms, especially military, both for internal consumption and external profit. These traits create major uncertainty and potentially profound international instability.

The potential for conflict arising from these dynamics is not particularly unique to the current and emerging security environment. What is new is the complicating presence of proliferation, not only of CBRN weapons, but also of a variety of militarily relevant technologies.

Proliferation has become an important feature of the current security landscape because of the changing dynamics between supply and demand. On the demand side, CBRN proliferation might be attractive for a number of well-identified reasons: leverage against regional rivals or major powers, the United States in particular; prevention of the exercise of leverage by others; prestige; diplomatic influence; a "ticket to the top table"; and others.

With respect to the supply side, the combination of rapidly advancing science and globalization has brought the knowledge and technology of CBRN weapons within reach of a much wider range of actors. Technological advances, particularly in the life sciences, are also creating capabilities that never before existed.

This supply-side trend is fostering a changing relationship between intent and capability. Conventional wisdom holds that "intent drives capability," in which the proliferation process is marked by a systematic move down a path toward the deployment of specific capabilities following a government's decision to acquire them. This assumption may no longer represent the exclusive dynamic in play. Rather, a second dynamic has also emerged in which advancing science and technology (S&T) combines with glo-

Small arms and other unsophisticated weapons present significant threat in failed and failing states



U.S. Army (Amanda Davis)

balization to generate an environment in which “capability shapes intention.” Indeed, a 2006 study by the National Research Council argues that future decisions to seek chemical and biological weapons (CBW) are not likely to be driven as much by the perceived efforts of an adversary as by scientific and technological advances.³

In a security context, the combination of what is interesting and what is doable—of curiosity and capability—could yield worrisome results. Although the Biological Weapons Convention bans any work on offensive biological weapons, particularly in a deteriorating security environment, states might be willing to explore the CBW potential of the life sciences, for example, not because they are committed to an institutionalized program or deploying a complete weapons system, but because they are curious. They might begin such an exploration merely because knowledge and capabilities exist somewhere in their scientific or economic establishments, and they are interested in what possibilities these capabilities might offer. Work might go forward with no sense of an ultimate objective, and certainly without the highest levels

of government intent on fielding a CBW capability. “Dabbling” could become the order of the day. Why would government officials, scientists, or others push for the creation of a dangerous capability? Often the only answer is because they can.

The challenge posed by the combination of curiosity and capability has been identified by the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory’s Center for Global Security Research as proliferation “latency”—possibly the greatest conundrum confronting those responsible for addressing proliferation.⁴ How does one counter proliferation in a world in which key actors—primarily states but increasingly nonstate actors as well—enjoy through the diffusion of technology developed for legitimate purposes a “breakout capability” that need be activated only when it is decided to do so?

In terms of conflict dynamics, if North Korea and Iran become recognized nuclear powers, no one could be certain of the chain of consequences. More countries might feel compelled to seek a countervailing capability. Current assessments seem to assume that the other countries would opt for nuclear

weapons. Is such an assumption warranted? A nuclear weapons program is expensive, technically challenging, lengthy in development, and politically risky. A case could be made, therefore, that rather than expending the massive resources required for developing a nuclear capability that takes years to come to fruition, countries would instead seek a more immediate response by exploiting what they already have on hand, which increasingly will be life sciences-based capabilities.⁵

The impact of proliferation on future conflict has been hotly debated. Some analysts argue that proliferation, especially of nuclear weapons, will increase the prospects of at least a limited nuclear war for actors that are not major powers, such as those in South Asia. Others argue the opposite, contending that the presence of nuclear weapons in second-tier countries will spur a reversion to more prolonged, lower level conflicts by other means—intimidation, subversion, terrorism, proxies, and insurgency operations—that are less likely to provoke escalation. Which side is right is impossible to know. What can be said, however, is that proliferation will give potentially global and unlimited dimensions

to conflicts that would otherwise be localized and perhaps limited.

While conflict between states, including those with CBRN weapons, cannot be dismissed, today's primary conflict contingencies are those complex conflicts in what Phil Williams has described as the "growing number of increasingly disorderly spaces" across the globe, spaces that are geographic, functional, social, economic, legal, and regulatory.⁶ These conflicts are often among communities, defined either by some concrete factor such

Congo, for example, has been "transnational" in that it has been in part a civil war involving several insurgent groups and warlords, and in part an international war for regional power and influence, with Angola, Chad, Namibia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe providing forces to one side, and Rwandan and Ugandan troops fighting for the other.

These contemporary community conflicts often share a number of characteristics. First, they involve failed/failing states or *anocracies*, regimes between democracy and

Anocracies also appear to be closely associated with contemporary violence. Again, according to University of Maryland data, countries with these forms of government are as much as two and a half times more likely than either democracies or autocracies to experience instability and be associated with violent conflict.

Second, contemporary community conflicts do not usually involve classic military confrontations in at least two respects. Most importantly, they involve a wider range of participants. Although formal military forces might be engaged, they are not always—in fact, not usually—the dominant participants. Rather, community-based conflicts are usually waged by competing militias, warring ethnic groups, warlords, and informal paramilitary organizations.

Moreover, these kinds of conflicts tend to be crude, with brutal and often indiscriminate violence. Few if any of the participants take notice of the "laws of war" as defined by the Geneva Conventions or other international legal agreements. The conditions that Lawrence Freedman has identified as necessary to leave civil society relatively unscathed in conflict—refined and discriminatory military means, operations in relatively unpopulated areas, and restraint that allows belligerents to restrict their options—are all unlikely to exist.⁸

A third quality community conflicts share is that they are hard to end. Data suggest that in any given year over the last decade, most active conflicts have been going on for some time. According to Dan Smith, in 1999, for example, 66 percent of existing conflicts were more than 5 years old, and 30 percent were more than 20 years old.⁹ No participant usually is in a position to claim victory. Several of the conflicts that now disfigure the global landscape have lasted for many years at a low level. Others have gone into abeyance following conclusion of a ceasefire or peace agreement, but they have resumed (as happened recently in Sri Lanka and Azerbaijan). The reasons for the difficulty in truly ending contemporary conflicts are many: one or more parties are insincere and use the hiatus to rebuild combat capability; one or more are disappointed with political or other developments following the agreement; one side or the other may fragment, with more radical elements continuing to resort to violence; or the underlying causes of the conflict are not addressed.

proliferation will give potentially global and unlimited dimensions to conflicts that would otherwise be localized and perhaps limited

as ethnicity, religion, or language, or increasingly by self-defined and self-selected criteria. They usually are not motivated by political ideology as were the major conflicts of the 20th century, but rather by the age-old goal of control—of territory, resources, or political, economic, and social power.

One should resist describing such conflicts as "internal" or "civil," however, in that they do not always remain contained within the boundaries of a single state, and the fighting can occur not only between nongovernmental entities and government, but also among a variety of nongovernmental players, and even among multiple governments. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the

autocracy that have an incoherent mix of the characteristics of each. The concept of a failed or failing state is well established. Recent analysis suggests an alarming likelihood that such states will become participants in crises at either the regional or global level. According to data analyzed by the University of Maryland's Center for International Development and Conflict Management, 77 percent of all international crises in the post-Cold War era have involved at least one state classified as unstable, fragile, or failed.⁷ This leads analysts to conclude that the "extension of the dangers of instability from the domestic to the international realm is . . . a defining characteristic of the current international system."



U.S. Army

Baghdad residents inspect damage from suicide car-bomb attack

The impact of the conflict on the psychology of the participants also plays a part. Attempts to destroy an adversary's community and infrastructure—homes, schools, places of worship, and other social fixtures—seem to have become a permanent feature of conflict. These efforts leave lasting scars that blend into existing community mythology to promote a “never forget” mentality, which fosters a willingness to return to violence.

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Lastly, community conflicts are localized. One reason some conflicts can endure for decades is that they remain contained geographically (even if they cross national borders). Most of the decade-long violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, has occurred in the eastern portions of the country. Darfur remains an ongoing challenge, but the conflict is not defined in terms of Sudan as a whole. In such cases, neither side has the capability—or sometimes the desire—to precipitate a decisive confrontation, allowing a level of violence to continue that neither side necessarily wants but with which both can live.

A variant of community warfare, one in which the “communities” are globally defined, is transnational terrorism of the kind promoted by al Qaeda and its affiliates. Osama bin Laden is the leader of a self-defined community—one committed to a particular brand of Islamic fundamentalism—that is neither bound by territory nor, in its mind, accountable to any authority other than God. In part, its members achieve their sense of community by posing themselves in opposition to another community, the West, in particular the United States and those “apostate” regimes associated with it.

Although more global in scope than many contemporary conflicts, transnational terrorism shares several characteristics with other forms of community conflict. While it is not necessarily state sponsored, al Qaeda has benefited from the existence of failed states and anocracies, which provide it important room for maneuver. It also has a proclivity for brutality, with high casualties



Airmen practice responding to chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, and environmental incidents

U.S. Air Force (Jason Epley)

rather than a particular political objective as the primary goal of an attack. And most certainly, transnational terrorism is a kind of conflict that will be difficult to bring to an end.

Why Such Conflicts?

The nature of conflicts and the manner in which they are conducted are closely related to the reasons for which they are waged. The causes of today's conflicts are a mix of political, economic, social, psychological, and environmental elements.

One concept that describes this combination is what has been called the “new medievalism” or “neomedievalism.” Philip Cerny captured the elements of this phenomenon by identifying the interaction of the following factors as the source of an ongoing “durable disorder”:

- competing institutional and overlapping jurisdictions of state, nongovernmental, and private interest groups
- more fluid territorial boundaries both within and across states
- growing alienation between entities in the global system responsible for innovation, communications on one hand and disfavored, fragmented hinterlands on the other
- increased inequalities within and isolation of permanent underclass and marginalized groups

■ growing importance of identity politics, ethnicity, and multiple, fragmented loyalties

■ contested property rights, legal status, and conventions

■ the spread of geographic and social “no go” areas where the rule of law does not run.¹⁰

Whether these factors truly represent sources of conflict similar to those in the Middle Ages is, of course, not really the point. Rather, what must be understood is the combination into a complex pattern of state, group, and individual elements interacting to yield today's unique conflicts. Moreover, to this neomedieval mix must be added other forces of modernity that have the effect of turbo-charging conflicts that otherwise would have little international impact. The forces of globalization, particularly the interconnectivity provided by modern information technology, as well as S&T advancing at unprecedented speed, are perhaps the two key elements in this regard.

Another school of thought emphasizes the psychological factors that generate today's small wars. It argues that the search for basic human needs such as identity, belonging, dignity, and self-respect can only be expressed through specific channels in today's international system and combine with massive, accelerating, and disorienting processes of modernization to produce enormous social discord and, ultimately, conflict and violence.



United Nations (Oliver Sargado)

Michael Mazarr summarized the argument in contending that “the nature of conflict has shifted from a largely rational enterprise waged by elite-dominated states in pursuit of power objectives to the product of mass psychological trauma attendant to modernization.”¹¹ In this view, conflict will increasingly have more to do with psychology and identity than military forces.

Yet another school of contemporary analysis regarding the sources of conflict focuses on the competition for and need to protect vital resources. Not surprisingly, this discussion is most often cast in terms of oil and natural gas, in connection with not only the geographic sources of these key resources, but also the security of the systems by which they are transported (pipelines, tanker routes, and ports) and processed and used (refineries and power stations). This orientation has also revived attention to other important resources, which have been a key objective in recent conflicts. Perhaps most notable in this regard are diamonds in Africa. Valuable timber stands have similarly been the object of conflict in Southeast Asia, particularly in Borneo. Concern has

also been reappearing over the prospects of “water wars,” given a new impetus by attention to climate change and the implications it might have in altering the availability of water resources in some vital regions, not least the Middle East. It should be noted that water-related disputes have tended to be resolved without resort to violence. Under the pressures of climate change, however, this might not remain the case.

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A final trend related to the purposes for which conflicts are fought may not have as much to do with the causes of conflict as the reason for their continuation. That is, in the current environment, those involved may have either little choice or desire to end the conflict. The issue of choice is in part related to the participation in contemporary conflict of child soldiers. Many of the conflicts discussed here are conducted by participants not

out of, and in some cases not even into, their teens. For them, conflict is a way of life; they have virtually no other experience, opportunities, or prospects. Thus, they comprise a pool who can do nothing but fight for at least a generation. They contribute to what has been called “supply-side war”—conflict driven by the availability of men who have no other skills.

Even if they know nothing else, whether all these individuals want to fight is questionable. But for another category of individuals the perpetuation of conflict is important, and they want it to continue because their power, status, and economic privilege result directly from it. This line of thought begins with the view that traditional interpretations do not fully take into account the rational economic calculations that drive many current conflicts. Rather, to understand contemporary violence one must also understand the economic dimensions underpinning it. David Keen, for example, identifies seven economic activities arising from war: pillage; extortion of protection money; control or monopolization of trade; exploitation of labor; access

to land, water, and mineral resources; theft of aid supplies; and advantages for the military. This is the “greed rather than grievance” school. For example, Paul Collier of the World Bank argues that greed is a principal cause of contemporary conflict, and that warring factions have an economic interest in initiating and sustaining war. While Collier provides macroeconomic evidence in support of his position, the more widely accepted view is that economic agendas account less for the origins than for the longevity of violent conflict.

How Are Such Conflicts Waged?

The final set of trends related to contemporary conflict relates to how conflict is conducted. At this level, the issues are less about the conflict and more about the war and the battle. The characteristics of the conduct of conflict will largely depend on the respective capabilities of the adversaries, particularly whether they are relatively balanced or whether one of the adversaries, such as the United States, has markedly greater military wherewithal. Despite these differences, however, one can suggest some commonalities that will manifest themselves somewhat differently depending on the combatants.

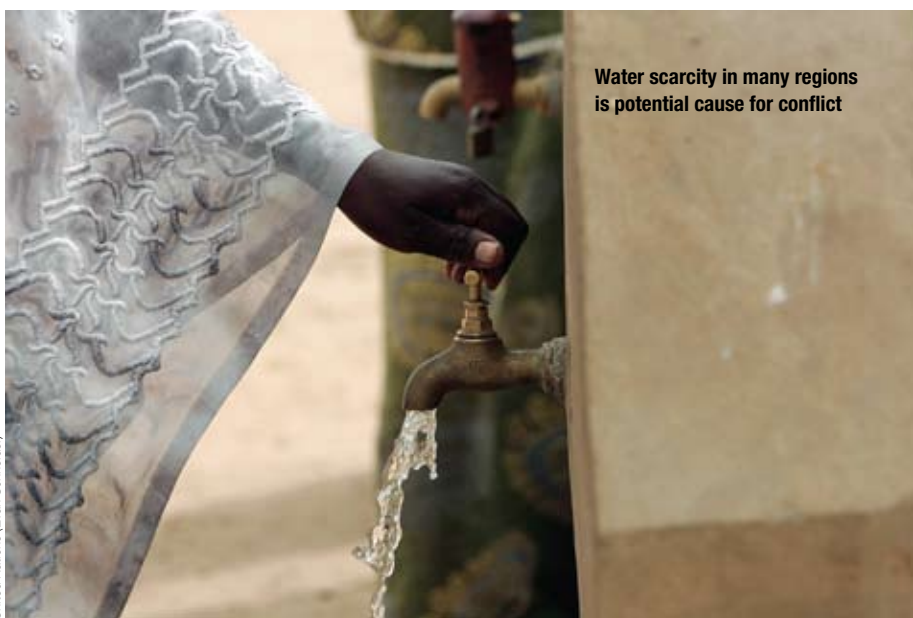
Future conflicts will not usually be fought with advanced conventional weapons. According to some figures, 80 to 90 percent of all casualties in recent wars have been caused by small arms and light weapons. One estimate puts gun deaths in conflicts between 60,000 and 90,000 per year. This is no surprise when one considers who is doing most of the fighting today and why. Those engaged in many community conflicts, especially in Africa, not only do not have access to more sophisticated technologies, but also, given their opponents, do not need them. In some cases, machetes do just fine.

Where the adversary is a more advanced military, such as the U.S. Armed Forces, the opponent has little ability to match its conventional capabilities. The use of less advanced weaponry reflects the goals of the weaker combatant, which are not to impose a decisive military defeat on an opponent such as the United States, but rather to undermine the legitimacy, authority, and determination of its government, as well as diminish its popular support, whether among noncombatants within the area of conflict or domestically.



Soldier on security duty in Iraq

U.S. Army (Richard Resnick)



Water scarcity in many regions is potential cause for conflict

United Nations (Evan Schneider)

The use of unsophisticated arms also reflects those who use them. Most combatants in contemporary conflicts are not professional soldiers. Rather, they are individuals, often unskilled and unemployed, recruited on the basis of their enthusiasm for a cause, or attracted by the camaraderie and sense of purpose provided by such enterprises. Over time they may become hardened veterans with honed skills who know nothing but conflict. But this still does not make them military professionals, although they can be formidable fighters.

In such cases, small arms, light weapons, and armaments with some degree of precision and other advanced characteristics predominate. They are enhanced by the use

of common explosives, albeit in increasingly sophisticated and innovative ways. In this regard, the appearance of improvised explosive devices using chlorine in Iraq might be a harbinger of things to come. A variant in the use of explosives is suicide bombing.

The point is that those involved in such conflicts have learned what limited capabilities can do. As retired Major General Robert Scales, USA, points out, they have recognized that unsophisticated weapons with increased killing power made possible by technologies that exploit “simple craft improvements” can reduce the margin in effectiveness that would otherwise favor the few but very effective (and expensive) weapons of their adversary.¹²

The technology of conflict will not remain static. Some technologies, several of which are still concepts more than finished products, have the theoretical potential to influence the conflict environment significantly over the next 15 to 20 years. Among those considered to have the greatest potential to alter the relative capabilities of combatants are biotechnology, nanotechnology,

the use of less advanced weaponry reflects the goals of the weaker combatant

directed energy weapons, advanced information systems, and cheaper and more reliable space-lift systems. Importantly, the development of the underlying technologies will be driven more by the private sector than the military, which will have to find ways to translate those commercially driven developments into military capabilities.

Since technological innovation does not automatically translate to new military capabilities, technical hurdles will need to be overcome, not least of which is the research and development cost of new or improved systems. Organizational, bureaucratic, social, and other factors may also retard the process. In reality, then, few actors—state or nonstate—will have the resources, expertise, and motivation to integrate these new technologies fully.

But perhaps they do not need to. An important example in this regard is the potential terrorist use of chemical and biological weapons. Some experts contend that terrorists are both unwilling and unable to exploit the life sciences. With respect to biological weapons, for example, they may not be able to handle advanced genetic engineering capabilities, despite the prevalence of genetic engineering competence, because it does not necessarily translate into terrorist capabilities. Other commentators disagree, arguing, for example, that increasingly sophisticated practical knowledge related to the life sciences is available, that the full potential of past programs was never unleashed, and that biological weapon use by small groups historically was relatively unsophisticated and far from representative of what moderately well-informed groups might do today.

Even if terrorists cannot exploit the most cutting-edge science and technol-

ogy, it does not mean they can do nothing. Terrorists do not need the most advanced capabilities. They do not demand the same operational performance as militaries. Their science and technology just have to be “good enough.”

Predicting how technological change will affect international conflict is therefore difficult. Technology is neutral, and how it is used will depend on human choices. Those choices, in turn, are influenced by the perceived utility of a given technology, the costs of acquiring it and making it usable for operations, the timelines to achieve that, and the negative consequences that may be attached. While many technologies have the *potential* for providing those who harness them with new capabilities, the *actual* impact is not guaranteed.

The target set is more expansive. Because of the disparity in capability, major direct assaults on the forces of a well-equipped adversary are often avoided. This does not mean those forces are not attacked, but such operations are usually far removed from the force-on-force battles generally thought to characterize conventional warfare. Rather, superior forces are targets of more classic guerrilla or insurgent operations of a kind that goes far back into history.

The military, however, represents only one set of targets in today's violent conflicts. Another set is economic assets, whether they relate to the source of a government's income (such as attacks against tourists in Egypt) or its infrastructure. In this regard, especially in the context of conflicts over resources, pipelines emerge as attractive targets—as they have been, for example, in Colombia. Another key infrastructure causing growing concern is the communications sector, which is vulnerable through cyberwar. Attacks against computer networks in the financial sector and against such security entities as the Pentagon have been widely publicized. Yet little or no publicly available evidence exists that terrorist groups or other adversaries engaged in conflict have perpetrated such attacks. Nevertheless, that sort of contingency is now considered one of the risks for which significant planning is necessary.

A third category of targets is symbols, again useful in undermining the legitimacy and authority of the adversary. The 9/11 attacks represented an assault against both economic and symbolic targets.

Finally, an important set of targets in many contemporary conflicts reflects a new phenomenon and illustrates the brutality of modern clashes. In today's conflicts, civilian populations have become fair game. It is not a question of “collateral damage,” which is a tragic dimension of any conflict, but of the conscious targeting of noncombatants as part of a strategy to destroy the adversary psychologically as well as physically. This strategy accounts for such measures as the deliberate use of rape against women, assaults against medical personnel (even those from international organizations) whom the laws of war consider neutral, and the use of violence to control food supplies and manipulate dynamics in refugee camps.

Many contemporary conflicts are made possible by the exploitation of illicit activities that involve what some analysts call “dark networks.” Those networks facilitate conflicts in two ways. First, they provide a source of income that funds both acquisitions and operations. Commentary has been widespread on the involvement of terrorist groups in the drug trade and other forms of illicit trafficking. Reports also indicate al Qaeda's efforts to raise money through the sale of diamonds from Africa. For most terrorist groups, these activities are largely instrumental in the sense that they allow the groups to continue doing those things they most want to do. Some conflicts, however, have become inseparable and indistinguishable from such activities, especially when it comes to control over key resources. In these cases, the violence is intended to ensure control, reflecting again the greed rather than grievance phenomenon.

Second, dark networks provide operational support. Most important here is the exploitation of a globalized financial system to manage the money required to continue the violence. But such networks clearly provide other forms of support as well, including logistic, transportation, and special services, such as documentation.

Combatants operate out of remote or inaccessible locations. The mountains of Afghanistan and the inhospitable territory on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border are examples. In the future, however, inaccessibility is equally likely to be found in the sprawling urban areas that have become a feature of the early 21st-century landscape. These slums and shantytowns are often already “no-go areas,” where authority is

asserted by actors other than representatives of the government, including those responsible for public security. As such, they are likely to contribute significantly to the dispersed, distributed, protected, and non-nodal kinds of operations that contemporary combatants are perfecting.

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Trends giving shape to international conflict in the years ahead portray a turbulent, volatile, and multidimensional dynamic. They suggest a wide set of diverse participants at the state and nonstate level motivated by a complex combination of political, economic, social, and other reasons related to the international system, national governmental performance, group dynamics, and individual alienation and psychological trauma. The spectrum of instruments used will be both brutal and savage, and sophisticated and discriminate. Military and civilian personnel and areas will be targets, facilitated by disorderly spaces and dark networks, most likely for the long term. This is not a pretty picture, nor is it a familiar one. As a result, it places enormous demands on thinking and operating creatively at both the policy and operational levels.

This article has provided some thoughts on trends related not to war but to conflict, albeit conflict involving often intensive and extensive violence. For U.S. policymakers, keeping this distinction in mind is important because clarity of view with respect to the real challenges will help to ensure appropriate policy responses. War in its traditional sense of the engagement of adversaries' armies is complicated enough and is getting more so as the potential battlefield expands into more dimensions. But the conflicts discussed here have a multifaceted dynamic that poses even more vexing challenges for the future.

Some of these challenges will involve decisions about when to engage in a conflict. At times, no choice will exist—for example, if the United States or its interests are the

direct target of violence. In most cases, however, the choice will not be so clear-cut, and the criteria for determining when Washington should engage or intervene will remain the subject of intense debate. Other questions will relate to how we engage. In this regard, two issues come immediately to mind. First, with whom will we engage, and under whose auspices? The occasions in which the United States will act alone will be rare if they arise at all. So with whom will Washington act, and by whose authority? Again, answers to these questions are not self-evident, and they could be hotly contested. The second issue pertains to whether U.S. involvement will necessarily entail the military. This issue is controversial and will plague future debates over engagement. Traditionally, the view of the U.S. military has been that its role is to "fight and win America's wars." But most future conflicts will not be America's wars or even America's conflicts. What the U.S. military response should be in such circumstances, therefore, needs careful calibration. **JFQ**

NOTES

¹ Antoine-Henri de Jomini, *Summary of the Art of War*, trans. G.H. Mendell and W.P. Craighill (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1892), 49.

² Donald Kagan, "History Is Full of Surprises," *Survival* (Summer 1999), 142.

³ National Research Council, *Globalization, Biosecurity, and the Future of the Life Sciences* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2006), 59. The mid-1990s scientific experiment to recover the virus responsible for the 1918 Spanish flu provides an important example of the kind of scientific research that could lead to offensive capability. The research team that did the recovery had recently developed a technique to analyze DNA in old, preserved tissues. Looking for a new application, they decided on the Spanish flu. It appears that "this work was not triggered by a search for flu treatments or the search for a new biowarfare agent, but by a rather simple motivation: [the] team could just do it." According to the team leader, "The 1918 flu was by far and away the most interesting thing we could think of." In short, the work went ahead because the team was curious, the issue was interesting, and they could do it.

⁴ Ronald F. Lehman II and Eileen Vergino, "Unclear and Present Danger: Understanding and Responding to WMD Latency," Presentation to the 2005–2006 CGSR Futures Roundtable, Center for Global Security Research, Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, January 19–20, 2006.

⁵ This is what Syria has done vis-à-vis Israel. Damascus has responded to Israel's nuclear arsenal by developing at least chemical and possibly biological weapons. Syria probably recognizes that its chemical weapons do not truly offset Israel's nuclear capabilities, but they do provide some countervailing capability that Israeli decisionmakers must take into account in any confrontation. In a deteriorating security environment, other countries faced with a sense of urgency to act and limited resources might emulate this "Syrian option."

⁶ Phil Williams, "Who Controls the Night? Disorderly Spaces and Global Security," *Ecologies of Disorder* [Internet Blog] Global Futures Forum, October 17, 2006, accessed at <www.globalfutures-forum.org/BlogComments.php?blogId=179&pubId=288&mon=&yr=

⁷ J. Joseph Hewitt, Jonathan Wilkenfeld, and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2008: Executive Summary* (College Park, MD: Center for Development and Conflict Studies, University of Maryland, 2008), 1.

⁸ Lawrence Freedman, "The Changing Forms of Military Conflict," *Survival* (Winter 1998/1999).

⁹ Dan Smith, "The World at War," Center for Defense Information, 1999, available at <www.cdi.org/issues/world_at_War/wwar99.htm>.

¹⁰ Philip Cerny, "The New Security Dilemma Revisited: Neomedievalism and the Limits of Hegemony," paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Le Centre Sheraton Hotel, Montreal, Quebec, March 17, 2004, available at <www.allacademic.com/one/prol/prol01/index.php?cmd=Download+Document&key=unpublished_manuscript&file_index=2&pop_up=true&no_click_key=true&attachment_style=attachment&PHPSESSID=dcf9266e65b2e6c6d967fabd2704e2f8>.

¹¹ Michael Mazarr, "Extremism, Terror, and the Future of Conflict," *Policy Review* (March 2006), available at <www.hoover.org/publications/policreview/4897841.html>.

¹² *Simple craft improvements* are those that enhance the effectiveness of relatively less advanced systems available to insurgents and other non-state adversaries such as increasing the reach of shoulder-fired, heat-seeking missiles by a few thousand feet. Robert Scales, *Fighting on the Edges: The Nature of War in 2020*, prepared for the Global Trends 2020 Project of the National Intelligence Council, 6.